

Book Review: Media and Social Justice by Sue Curry Jansen, Jefferson Pooley, and Lora Taub-Pervizpour

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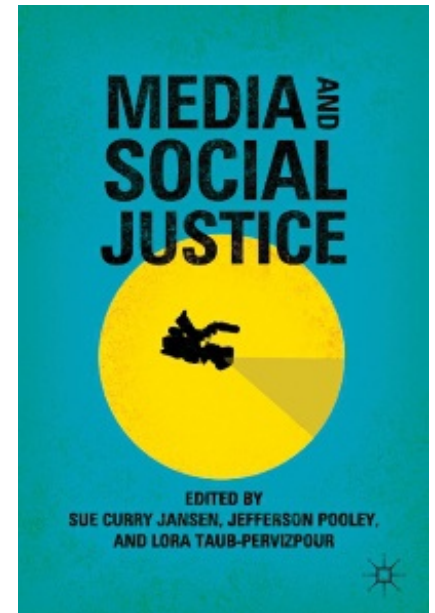
Media and Social Justice charts the work that critical media scholars and activists are undertaking to combat social injustice and misrepresentation in the media. The authors provide a diverse collection of examples, but conclude that there is still a long way to go before we can fully eliminate abuses of power. An excellent guide for students, with several interesting and innovative chapters, discovers [Joel Suss](#).



Media and Social Justice by Sue Curry Jansen, Jefferson Pooley, and Lora Taub-Pervizpour. Palgrave MacMillan. 284 pages. June 2011.

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One of Britain's glaring democratic deficits lies in the unequal distribution of media resources and representation. Sure, compared with many countries around the world where government censorship and control is rife and stifling, Britain has a free and vibrant press. But not many would claim that the situation is ideal. Up until recently there remained the very real possibility of a Murdoch media empire, shattered only after a public outcry over the phone hacking scandal at the *News of the World*. A quick flip through any tabloid will reveal overt sexism and unrestrained female objectification; a recent article on this blog recounted [testimony given to the Leveson inquiry](#) on precisely that issue. Moreover, large segments of society, particularly ethnic minorities and the poor, are consistently marginalized by mainstream media sources.



Thankfully, critical media scholars and activists are at the forefront in advancing social justice and combating inequity in the media landscape. Independent media channels continue to pop up, students are expected to challenge existing power structures, pressure groups are pushing for increased access to media for marginalized groups, and more favourable media policy is being advocated for by various camps. *Media and Social Justice*, edited by Sue Curry Jansen, Jefferson Pooley and Lora Taub-Pervizpour, is an excellent compilation of essays that explores some of the key people and theories leading the charge.



Divided into four sections, the book is remarkably diverse. An examination of theoretical frameworks for transforming media, community collaborations for media justice, ongoing power struggles and strategies for shaping media policy are considered in turn, with key topics including an exploration of the direct and indirect effects strong defamation laws have on free-speech, an examination of how those marginalized by media can suffer self-esteem issues, and ways in which collaborative media projects can benefit communities. But as is often the case with a book comprised of short essays, what is gained in diversity is lost in depth. There is a wide variety of subjects, but they are often constrained by space and feel somewhat incomplete. Moreover, there is a varying degree of quality across the pieces. Some are intellectually profound and provocative while others are unfortunately simply boring.

One of the most enjoyable and thought provoking essays, 'Software Freedom as Social Justice: The Open Source Software Movement and Information Control' by John L. Sullivan, explores the social justice angle in the movement for free software. Groups such as Free Open Source Software (FOSS) are engaged in a fight for equal access and against the concentration of media control. These advocates argue that program code should not be considered patentable and limiting access is akin to transgressing the right to free speech. The movement is responsible for a novel legal framework that has turned traditional intellectual property rights on its head. The General Public License (GPL) is the opposite of copyright, in that it reserves "the rights of individuals to use, modify, and redistribute cultural materials." This has allowed programmers to both share and build on each other's artistic creativity, and expertise.

Another excellent piece, written by Mark Andrejevic and entitled 'Watching Back', discusses the impact of reverse-monitoring. The omnipresence of video technology in the hands of individual citizens has allowed for the surveillance of authorities, preventing rampant abuses of power. *Sousveillance*, or bottom-up monitoring, has been instrumental in identifying bogus police charges and instances of police brutality. Moreover, "inverse surveillance...offer[s] a convincing counter-narrative to that promulgated by authorities, who may have better access to mainstream media or public relations strategies." Importantly, reverse monitoring effectively challenges dominant official accounts, exposing essential information and enriching public knowledge and discourse.

The editors of the book see media transformation as a "necessary, but far from sufficient, condition for creating a just society." By offering up what is overall a rather provocative collection of essays it is clear that the authors hope to reignite the conversation between critical media scholarship and social justice studies. This book can certainly be considered a success in that respect and for encouraging its readers to become more actively engaged. Undergraduate students of media and culture should certainly find chapters of interest in this book, and anyone whose curiosity in the media machine has been sparked by recent events will not be disappointed. On the whole, there is much to be gained from this book.

Social justice causes are also being helped by the exogenous forces of internet connectivity and the spread of cheap communication devices. A fundamental restructuring of the media landscape, from a top-down structure to an individual-led, decentralised environment of media creation and consumption, is underway. There is no room for complacency though, the editors and authors repeatedly point out, as there is a long way to go to ensure equitable media access and eliminate abuses of power.

Joel Suss joined the LSE PPG in January 2012 and is currently a MPA student. Hailing from Montréal, Canada, where he earned a BA in Political Science from Concordia University, Joel has worked in the most recent Canadian federal elections campaign for the New Democratic Party (NDP), now the official opposition to the government. He is primarily focused on public and social policy, welfare inequality dynamics and institutional reform. [Read more reviews by Joel.](#)

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